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AUTHOR Norris, Deborah; Schumacker, Randall E.
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ABSTRACT

In March 1996, the Region XI Education Service Center, Fort Worth (Texas), was designated to continue a project implemented in 1990 by the Texas Education Agency to study the overall effectiveness of special education programs. The 1996 project was extended in 1997. This paper reports on the first of three newly planned study components, the "Adult Outcome Component," which was designed to look at students in their last year of high school and to follow them for 4 years after graduation. Other components will focus on the secondary school experience of special education students and case studies of student records, interviews, and observations. For the adult outcome component, 832 students in special education programs from 40 school districts were identified. A comparison sample of students without disabilities remains to be selected. A 65-item questionnaire was developed to gather information from each student's comprehensive and special education records, and a followup questionnaire is to be developed to elicit student responses about their educational experiences. Over the next several years, a number of efforts will be implemented to gather information about students, and data will be analyzed on individual differences among disability categories, gender, ethnicity, and community type. Findings of previous studies indicate that students with disabilities do not fare as well as their nondisabled counterparts after graduating from high school. State and federal legislative changes that have affected special education, especially in the delivery of transition services, should have favorable impacts on the quality and effectiveness of programs for students with disabilities. (Contains eight tables and one reference.) (SLD)

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Texas Special Education Effectiveness Study

Deborah Norris, M.S., CRC
Education Service Center, Region XI
Fort Worth, Texas

Randall E. Schumacker, Ph.D.
University of North Texas
Denton, Texas

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Texas Special Education Effectiveness Study

Abstract

This paper summarizes one aspect of a three-fold expansion of a follow-up study implemented by the Texas Education Agency in 1990 to assess the overall effectiveness of special education programs and services in Texas in developing students' life skills, with a particular focus on the individual transition planning process.

Texas Special Education Effectiveness Study

Deborah Norris, Education Service Center-Region XI
Randall E. Schumacker, University of North Texas

INTRODUCTION

In March of 1996, the Region XI Education Service Center (ESC) located in Fort Worth, Texas was identified to continue a project that was implemented in 1990 by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). This project was designed to assess the overall effectiveness of special education programs and services in developing students' life skills and to specifically look at the transition planning process. During the 1996-1997 school year Region XI ESC wrapped up data collection, analyzed existing data, and disseminated results and recommendations for year six of the original project. In January of 1997, Region XI ESC received approval from TEA for a proposal to expand the scope of the effectiveness study for several more years. This paper summarizes the first of three newly planned study components in the second funded proposal, which was implemented during the 1996-1997 school year.

Over the next several years, these new study components will expand the scope of the original project and be implemented simultaneously. The first component, presented in this paper, is referred to as the "Adult Outcome Component" and was implemented during the 1996-1997 school year. This particular component was designed to look at students in their last year of high school. These students will be followed for four years after graduation. A small comparison group of students without disabilities will be identified at a later date using common variables such as gender, age, and ethnicity. The second component is referred to as the "In-School Component" which will be implemented during the 1997-1998 school year and focus on the secondary experience of students re3ceiving special education services beginning at age 14. A third component will be designed at a later date to conduct case study content analysis of student records, interviews, and observations.

Overview

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 made transition planning a required component of the Individual Education Program (IEP) for students who receive special education services in public schools. Individual transition planning was to be implemented by the school district no later that age 16, or earlier if necessary. On June 4, 1997 President Clinton signed into law the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (P. L. 105-17, IDEA) which further strengthened the focus on post school outcomes of employment and independent living. A statement of needed

transition services with a focus on the student's course of study must be included in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) by age 14. This provision was meant to augment the separate transition requirement of including statements of needed transition services in the IEP by age 16.

Other changes to IDEA that will impact transition services for youth with disabilities include the following: (a) adding related services to the five areas to be considered in planning the coordinated set of activities in the original definition of transition services (i.e., instruction, community experiences, employment and other post-school living objectives, daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluation; (b) increasing the required membership of the State Advisory Panel; (c) including students with disabilities in general state and district wide assessment programs; (d) removing transition requirements for youth with disabilities in adult correctional facilities; and (e) requiring notification of transfer of parental rights at the age of majority. As a result of this evolving federal and state legislation, as well as the awareness of research suggesting that transition planning is crucial to adult success, Texas implemented and continues to support a series of studies to investigate the effectiveness of special education services; specifically the transition planning process. This support was given in order to anticipate and address the transition needs of students, to facilitate a smooth emergence from school into adult life, and to address questions raised about the implementation of the Texas "Memorandum of Understanding" on transition planning for students receiving special education services.[1]

The following general questions were identified for investigation in the three planned components to be implemented over the next several years.

- What are the outcomes of students who receive special education services during their secondary grades in public schools in the areas of employment, post secondary education, independent living, recreation and leisure, and social and interpersonal networks?
- What support systems exist in the community for these young adults?
- What are the common experiences during high school of graduates who are distinguished by their level of success in the adult world?
- What are the relationships between the characteristics of the student, family, and community and the adult outcomes of former students of special education programs?
- What are the educational experiences of students who are currently receiving special education services at the secondary level of public school?
- How is transition planning accomplished for students with disabilities?
- What is the impact of transition planning on the educational experiences and adult outcomes of students served in special education programs?

[1] 19 Texas Administrative Code (TAC) 89.246, effective September 1990

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Sample

Sampling of students was conducted in two stages. School districts were first selected to represent the diversity of the state. Community type classification labels assigned to districts by TEA were used to stratify districts geographically. The eight community types assigned were major urban, major suburban, other central city, central city suburban, independent town, non-metro fast growing, non-metro stable, and rural. These eight community types were collapsed into three general types in the sample matrix to simplify the random sampling process and to accommodate for missing cells in the matrix. Superintendents of these districts were contacted by mail to provide consent to participate the study. The sample was comprised of 832 students who were enrolled in special education programs and services from 40 school districts across the state of Texas. A comparison group of students without disabilities has yet to be sampled.

Instrument

A 65-item questionnaire was developed to gather information from each student's comprehensive and special education records. This record review provided information about the student and his or her transition planning process. A follow-up questionnaire will be developed to solicit student responses about post-school outcomes. The Adult Outcome Questionnaire will be mailed directly to graduates who consent to continued participation in the longitudinal phase of the study. Information about these adults will be gathered at planned intervals over the next four years as part of the first component. The first year of data collected from the record review is presented in this paper.

Procedure

Student names from selected districts were provided to project staff from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Student names were alphabetized by their primary disability. The student sample was then selected from participating districts using a stratified random sampling method based on the primary disability. The 14 disability categories identified in the PEIMS data set were collapsed down to 7 prior to the sampling process. The 7 disability categories include auditory impairment, visual impairment, mental retardation, emotional disturbance, learning disability, speech impairment, and other (includes low incident disability categories). The number of students chosen from each district was proportional to the size of the district. Students in the sample were assigned a number so as to protect their identity. Student names and social security numbers will be used for follow-up purposes.

Information collected will be maintained in a secure location at the Region XI ESC.

At the time districts agreed to participate in the study a district contact person was identified for each participating district. The district contact person identified data collector(s) who contracted with Region XI ESC to conduct a record review for each student in the district sample. Written instructions for data collection were provided to each participating district along with a questionnaire to be filled out for each student included in the sample. Data collectors were paid $40.00 per survey for their services.

Research Questions

The following specific research questions are addressed in the results section of this paper.

1. Does the sample data represent the special education population in Texas?
2. What transition services were provided to students in their last year of high school?
3. What are the students' expectations for employment, vocational training, post-secondary education, independent living, and recreation/leisure activities after graduation from high school?
4. Did a significant percentage of students have an ITP?
5. Did a significant percentage of students' IEPs include objectives developed from each ITP?
6. What were students' instructional arrangements for the 1996-1997 school year?
7. Did a significant percent of students take the TAAS test during the last administration?
8. What alternative assessment instrument did students take in lieu of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test?

RESULTS

Data collected during the 1996-1997 program review was coded and entered into SPSS for data analysis. Selected results from the record review data are represented in this text. Table 1 shows demographic data for ethnicity, gender, disability classification, and sample size by community type. The sample was originally stratified by community type and primary disability that closely approximates the percentages found in the special education population in Texas for the 11th grade.

Insert Table 1 Here

The predominant transition service provided students with disabilities was academic instruction. This was followed by vocational education classes, career counseling, community based training, independent living, and ongoing employment support, respectively (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 Here

Table 3 indicates that student expectations for employment after graduation was mostly competitive in nature (64%); vocational training expectations were either not addressed in the ITP (31%) or indicated as vocational rehabilitation (32%); post secondary education expectations were community college (32%) or trade/technical school (14%); independent living expectations involved living alone with no support (57%) or living with family (16%); and recreation/leisure activity expectations were mostly independent in nature (66%).

Insert Table 3 Here

The percentage of students reported to have a written Individual Transition Plan (ITP) for the 1996-1997 school year was 85%. The percent of students whose IEP included annual objectives developed from the ITP was 70%.

Insert Tables 4 & 5 Here

Table 6 indicates the primary instructional arrangement provided students with disabilities who were identified as being in the 12th grade during the 1996-1997 school year. The resource room (26%), the regular classroom (24%), and vocational settings (21%) were the most prominent placement for students in the sample.

Insert Tables 6, 7, & 8 Here

CONCLUSIONS

The primary goal of this study is to gather information that will allow informed decisions to be made about secondary transition programs and services in the state of Texas. This paper presents a small fraction of the information collected from a student record review conducted during the summer of 1997. Over the next several years a number of interrelated components will be simultaneously implemented to gather information about students who have exited public school as well as students in the thrust of their secondary school years. Analysis of current data has yet to be conducted on individual differences among disability categories, gender, ethnicity, and community type. Follow-up data will be collected this next year on student experiences after graduation as well as a satisfaction rating of their secondary education experience in preparing them for adult life.

Findings of previous studies have provided historical evidence that students with disabilities did not fare as well as their nondisabled counterparts after graduating from high school in pursuit of adult endeavors. A number of positive federal and state legislative changes affecting the delivery of special education services, specifically transition services, have transpired over this past year. It will be exciting to observe the impact of these changes on the quality and effectiveness of programs and services for students with disabilities in the Texas public school system.

REFERENCES

Region XI Education Service Center. (1997). Special Education Effectiveness Study, Technical Report 1995-1996. Fort Worth, TX.

Table 1. Demographic Data

Variable	N	Percent
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	410	49 %
Hispanic	203	24 %
African American	179	22 %
Asian	9	1 %
Non-response	31	4 %
Gender		
Male	536	65%
Female	293	35%
Primary Disability Classification		
Learning Disability	470	56.5%
Mental Retardation	91	10.9%
Emotional Disability	70	8.4%
Auditory Impairment	34	4.1%
Visual Impairment	23	2.8%
Speech Impairment	21	2.5%
Other	110	13.2%
Missing	13	1.6%
Community-Type		
Area 1	11	27.5%
Area 2	22	55.0%
Area 3	7	17.5%
Total (Districts)	40	

Table 2. Transition Services Provided

Vocational Service	N	Percent
Vocational Assessment	143	4.3
Career Counseling	353	10.7
Rehabilitation Counseling	96	2.9
Vocational Education Classes	385	11.7
Community based training	240	7.3
Job Placement	179	5.4
Ongoing employment support	195	5.9
Academic Instruction	578	17.5
Independent Living	202	6.1
Self Advocacy training	90	2.7
Social skills training	135	4.1
Income Assistance	86	2.6
Residential Support Services	33	1.0
Transportation	177	5.4
Case Management	85	2.6
Guardianship	40	1.2
Medical Assistance	52	1.6
Assistive/Adaptive	46	1.4
Attendant Services	9	.3
Financial Planning	46	1.4
Individual-Family Support	96	2.9
Other	37	1.1
Non-Response	49	5.9

Table 3. Student expectations for employment, vocational training, post secondary education, independent living, and recreation/leisure activities after high school graduation.

Expectation Area	N	Percent
Employment		
Competitive	531	64 %
Supported	106	13 %
Sheltered	41	5 %
Vocational	29	3 %
Other	43	5 %
Missing	82	10 %
Vocational Training		
Vocational Rehabilitation	170	20 %
JTPA	25	3 %
MHMR	55	7 %
TCB	24	3 %
Other	220	26 %
Not addressed in ITP	258	31 %
Missing	80	10 %
Post Secondary Education		
Community College	268	32 %
University	89	11 %
Business School	11	1 %
Trade/Technical School	114	14 %
Military Training	31	4 %
Adult Education	9	1 %
Other	198	24 %
Not addressed in ITP	92	11 %
Missing	20	2 %
Independent Living		
Live with family	132	16 %
Live alone -no support	472	57 %
Live alone - supported	34	4 %
Supervised Living	59	7 %
Other	19	2 %
Not addressed in ITP	38	5 %
Missing	78	9 %
Recreation/Leisure Activity		
Community	49	6 %
Independent	551	66 %
Specialized	67	8 %
Day Program for Disabled	21	3 %
Other	24	4 %
Not addressed in ITP	45	5 %
Missing	75	9 %

Table 4. Percent of students who have a written ITP for the 1996-1997 school year

Written ITP	N	Percent
Yes	703	85 %
No	80	9 %
Not Applicable	5	1 %
Missing	44	5 %

Table 5. Percent of students whose IEP included written objectives developed from ITP

	N	Percent
Yes	583	70 %
No	117	14 %
Don't Know	27	3 %
Not Applicable	12	2 %
Missing	93	11 %

Table 6. Students Primary Instructional Arrangement for 1996-1997 School Year

Instructional Arrangement	N	Percent
Regular Classroom	202	24.3 %
Resource Room	217	26.6 %
Self-contained - Moderate	65	8.0 %
Self-contained - Severe	66	8.1 %
Self-contained - Separate Campus	25	3.1 %
Vocational	171	20.9 %
Homebound	16	2.0 %
Hospital Class	3	.4 %
Nonpublic School Day	9	1.1 %
Residential Care	6	.7 %
State School	1	.1 %
Community Class	2	.2 %
Other	34	4.1 %
Missing	15	1.8 %

Table 7. Percent of students who took TAAS during last administration

Took TAAS	N	Percent
Yes	218	26 %
No	565	68 %
Missing	49	6 %

Table 8. Percent of alternative assessment instruments administered[2]

Assessment Instrument	N	Percent
CLASS	105	13 %
Brigance	50	6 %
TAAS	14	2 %
Portfolio	10	1 %
Vineland	7	.6 %
Woodcock Johnson	7	.6 %
WIAT	6	.6 %
TONI	3	.2 %
Other	80	10 %
Missing	550	66 %

[2] On June 17, 1997 Governor Bush signed into law a bill that would gradually phase students with disabilities into the Texas public school accountability system. This list represents frequencies of alternative assessments administered to students identified as exempt from taking TAAS.